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ABSTRACT

Examined are the development of the concept of accountability in American education and the application of accountability to the field of special education, with particular reference to special education in rural areas. Accountability is defined as meaning that the schools will be held accountable for producing results. Elements of a program of accountability are enumerated, and the practice of performance contracting is related to accountability. Cited are recent legal decisions concerning the rights of children and their parents, particulary handicapped children. Implications of the legal decisions for general education, special education, and rural areas are pointed out. Problems associated with special education in sparsely settled areas, such as low incidence and lack of a population base, are considered. The solution to the delivery of services to handicapped children in rural areas is seen to not be as simple as special class versus regular class, or resource room versus special class. However, several suggested alternatives, approaches, and projections based upon the idea of accountability are offered. (KW)

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APPLICATION OF ACCOUNTABILITY TO SPECIAL EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS*

Dr. Glenn A. Vergason

This presentation seeks to develop three main topics: (1) The development of the concept of accountability in American Education; (2) The application of accountability to the field of Special Education; and (3) The application of accountability to Special Education in rural areas.

There are probably as many theories on the development of the concept of accountability in education as there have been writings in the last two years. No one reason can be given for this development but one who reads the literature soon finds that scarcely a topic in the history of education has been so explosive, spread so far, so rapidly, or has been more universally accepted by parents, taxpayers, etc. Accountability is also a topic which places fear in the hearts of teachers and administrators, fear by many that the public school system cannot survive the present crisis. Lessinger attributes Congress with asking the questions and pushing for the kinds of hard data which resulted in the accountability movement. Dr. Lessinger was requested to prove that Title I in ESEA had worked and when the USOE could not produce adequate proof Congress manditated evaluation systems in Titles VII and VIII of ESEA.

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My understanding of this subject is probably about like that of most persons who try to keep on top of a new topic by reading all that has been written. In my case it has been further enhanced by having Dr. Leon Lessinger on our campus, author of the book, "Every Child a Winner,"(1970), and the man often attributed with being the father of accountability. Lessinger maintains that he was not the primary inventor but the implementor of accountability as intended by Congress

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through the Texarkana project. The Texarkana project was a performance contract initiated between the Texarkana School District and a private firm (Dorsett) for the improvement of reading and math skills of potential drop-outs. The full RFP (request for proposals) for this is published in the journal Educational Technology (volume 9, pp. 5-10) and can give the reader a good concept of what performance contracting is all about. A further discussion of performance contracting will be developed later.

Lessinger also attributes parents with a strong role in the support of the concept of accountability. Without parents and/or taxpayers' support, this concept like many would have soon been a fad which quickly faded away. We have seen these fads come and go in education but the base of support for accountability is too broad to be soon lost. The Gallop poll (Phi Delta Kappa, 1970) indicates that 76% of the public would like principals and teachers to be more accountable for the learning of children.

At this writing as many as 13 legislators have or are in the process of passing laws relative to accountability. In some states like Oregon all first graders and transfer students must be assessed and if found to be deficient on academic skills a program of remediation must be undertaken.

Public support for accountability has resulted from many complex forces within education and the environment. Until recent times education has been the answer or the vehicle for solving the problems of many. For the immigrant, the poor and others, education was the source of fulfillment, of upward mobility, the hope for a better life. There is no longer enough money to completely support education and at the same time allocate adequate resources to equally as pressing problems such as pollution, poverty, drugs, and numerous other seemingly unsolvable problems. Taxes and school bond issues have gotten to the place where taxpayers have revolted. Schools are not only not solving all the problems but appear to be failing with 20-40% of inner-city

children and these add to the overall problems of society.

Education continues to increase in cost. With increases in manufacturing costs, economies are often accomplished within production which somewhat off-sets the increases. Increased production can also serve as an off-setting force resulting in what is termed balanced growth. In the case of education unbalanced growth occurs and projections of cost estimates indicate the curve for the cost of education and the curve for the gross national product will cross in AD 2080. This unbalanced growth has been described in detail by Baumol (197-) and Dr. Lessinger often refers to this crisis for funds as the Baumol Crunch. Thus, as the cost of education increases the Baumol Crunch will force us to an even greater accounting of our programs, a shift from an emphasis on efficiency in school operation to one that includes effectiveness. Some authorities view effectiveness to be what accountability is all about.

If there were no problems of increasing taxes there would still be problems of accountability. When part of the children were in separate but unequal schools and test results were not available, when bussing and school transfers did not make inadequate education so obvious it was easier to ignore the problems of 20-40% of the school population who were achieving far below expected levels. These inadequacies are now clearly visible and have been magnified by parents who have gone before school boards to say,"I don't care what you say about my child's environment, we sent them to school and we expect you to learn them."

What makes up an accountability program? Many ideas have been offered on this subject but the definition and rules of the game are fairly simple. Accountability means the schools will be held accountable for producing results. Lessinger says (1971) "Accountability is a regular public report by independent revivers of demonstrated student accomplishment promised for the expenditure of resources p 73."

No longer is it acceptable to say that because of his environment, his poor genes, lack of motivation, etc. that the child cannot learn or that it is his fault or that of his parents that he does not learn. Schools are called to teach every child, to make every child a winner, to offer schools without failure. Thus, the first element of a program of accountability is for schools to state what their objectives are and their success is to be judged by how well they reach these goals. Secondly, schools are called upon to have an outside audit. This concept does not imply that a private corporation has to test every child to see if the teacher has done his job. It may mean an outside observer sees what we do and lastly that we third publish the results. Many schools have assessed and evaluated programs and schools for years but they never took the public into their confidence to indicate areas of strength and of weakness and plans for improvement.

How does the practice of performance contracting relate to accountability? Performance contracting is simply a technique which has been used as a method to test out one facet of accountability. It involves contracting with a group or company to increase the performance of children in several specified areas which are deemed by the school system as needing remediation above and beyond what teachers can accomplish in the regular system. Performance contracting comes from the field of engineering. The contractor is required to produce a certain amount of work on a building in a certain period of time. If he does not produce the proper amount of work he is theoretically docked or penalized. In education the performance contractor would be expected to produce a specified amount of gain in achievement, attitude, or some other demension or be penalized.

How do performance contracts work? A performance contract is stated

in such a manner as to make it appear that the contractor "guarantees performance." The contractor agrees that unless the students in his program gain a specified amount he will not be paid. If the contract calls for each underachiever in reading to achieve 1.4 grade levels in 9 months of school then the contractor is not paid unless the child reaches that level or is paid a percentage if he reaches a lower level of success. What most persons fail to realize is if 75 out of 150 students do not reach the 1.4 grade level improvement and if the contractor is not paid for 75 students he does not lose his shirt. Performance contracts call for the contractor to receive payment for setting up the program, for delivery of hardware (teaching machines) and for software (teaching programs). The items of hardware and software come at higher prices in a performance contract than the school system could ordinarily buy the same equipment or program off the shelf. What school systems are paying for is the management system and efforts beyond what can be exerted through reorganization of available resources.

What are the contractors chances of producing the desired changes? One might respond "if God is on your side how can you lose?" What I am alluding to is the regression effect. This has beer mentioned in the literature numerous times but the best treatment of the subject is in an article in (June 1971) Phi Delta Kappa entitled Testing Hazards In Performance Contracting (Stake, 1971). The regression effect stated simply is, on any two sets of scores an individuals score on the second test will tend to regress towards the true mean of the group. Thus, on any post test low scores tend to rise and high scores tend to drop. Most performance contracts will be done with students whose scores are at the extremes and thus are the most likely to change. No one knows how much this change will be although ways of predicting it were described by Alice Horne, 1941). What we need to know is how many children would show an increase of one year in reading due to the regression effect even if no training program had been in existence.

There is some question as to the legality of performance contracting (Martin & Blaschke, 1971), but this should not concern us for if performance contracting is successful enough the laws assigning educational responsibility to local school boards can be changed. The performance contract negotiated in the Texarkana School District was the first time a public school contracted with a private firm to provide academic instruction, the first use of performance contracting within a public school system and the first use of a management support group. Whether performance contracting will survive or not is unknown at this time. Most persons I have talked with and the literature suggest performance contracting is transitory but that accountability will be with us from now on.

Performance contracting, however, can be used as one method for obtaining curricular and software development where more adequate materials and programs can be made available for schools. Some observations indicate that publishers involved in performance contracts have discovered their programs were poorly sequenced and lacked data on the success of the programs with all except normal and accelerated learners. Such discoveries on the part of publishers might prevent many poorly tested materials off the market and lead to an accountability for publishers. Performance contracts cannot be relied upon to solve the problems of all school systems because there are just not that many companies around. Already changes are occurring in what systems are doing under performance contracts. The Dallas School system designated the teachers for the performance contractor,wrote the objectives, and maintained complete control over the performance contract. Dallas has used the performance contract to develop the skills, materials, training procedures and management system to "turnkey" one of the programs into other schools where regular teachers and others are now applying the techniques. The "turnkey" concept is important for it

provides a way of experimenting and then implementing programs into the mainstream. At present many systems innovate but few successfully incorporate new programs into their system. Philadelphia has gone a step further by setting up a program within the school system whereby teachers and administrators agreed on a goal of 5.5 reading level for all pupils before students enter the sixth grade. The program involved extensive training of the teachers, provision of up to 40 different reading approaches, professional commitment, and added materials. This represents one school system's approach of working within the system. Dr. Nolan Estes has characterized this as the "in-house" approach in contrast to the "out-house" approach. Further developments in performance contracting has occurred in Cherry Creek, Colorado where the Board of Education, through support from the Colorado State Department of Education, has contracted with "I Teams" of their own teachers for specified results. The system has contracted with groups of teachers for educationally handicapped, potential dropouts and most recently for teachers to work with emotionally disturbed children to integrate them into regular classrooms (Mecklenburger & Wilson, 1971). It may be that the freedom of organization and added incentive of rewards and recognition causes some teachers to change their own expectancy phenomenon.

Performance contracting has not reached its zenith but I doubt if it will be sustained as a practice without federal dollars. This view is not shared by all, and, in fact, some persons feel performance contracting will lead to significant education reform (Martin & Blaschke, 1971).

What does all of this have to do with special education? It is certain that Special Education is a part of regular education and as such must be concerned with the same efficiency and effectiveness issues. Special educators like all educators must be concerned with the attitudes and actions of the publics we serve. We can no longer assume that because it is Special Education it is good for everyone. We cannot rely on the sympathy of legislators and

others but must produce hard data on our successes and failures. Special classes with inadequately prepared teachers, with little in the way of materials or techniques which would make it special or stimulating cannot be tolerated. Placement in special classes or programs must be carefully monitored. Just like educators have advocated individualized curriculum so we must advocate an individualized placement and programming for each child. We must do a better job than has ever been done in offering individualized instruction.

Why has performance contracting not been tried in special education? The most logical reason I can find is that regular education is still working under the "Itard Principle." You remember Itard believed Victor had an intact mind and all educators had to do was to find a way to teach him correctly. In the case of children in Special Education we have convinced everyone that the "Itard Principle" does not apply and, in fact, we have convinced everyone we are the only ones who can teach some of these children. We have been so successful that we are now finding it difficult to integrate handicapped children into regular classes.

Some questioning of the practices in Special Education has taken the form of legal actions. In cases such as, Arreola vs Board of Education the courts ruled parents must be informed and have a part in their child's placement. In Corarrubias vs San Diego and Stewart vs Phillips there are elements of punitive damages being sought by the plaintiff for children being mislabelled. Educators who have tended to ignore court decisions better pay attention to these because dollar judgements could be made against administrators and school systems, (Ross, Young & Cohen, 1971). In the case of Diana vs State Board of Education filed in North District Court of California in behalf of 9 Mexican Americans, the petition claimed the children were incorrectly placed in Special Education

As a result of this suit, the court ruled that children whose primary home language is other than English (1) must be tested in both their primary language and English, (2) that such children must be tested only with tests or parts of tests that do rely heavily on items such as vocabulary or unfair verbal questions, (3) that Mexican and Chinese Americans already in programs must be retested, (4) that each district must submit a plan for retesting and re-evaluating all children on a systematic basis, and, (5) that a plan for special supplemental individual training be provided to help each child back into the regular school classes. Number five should really give you some food for thought. Thus, it is clear that law is very much with us and we must learn how to function to use the law to meet the needs of children and we should not be guilty of doing anything which would remove the rights of children or their parents. We should view the legal actions as one form of accountability against "the system" and be cognizant that thenext step may be against individual teachers. Dunlop (1971) has an excellent review of the rights of parents, students, teachers and school systems, (in focus on Guidance November 1971).

The most significant actions related to education during the last year have not occurred within the education profession but within the legal realm. The recent ruling of the California Supreme Court citing ad valorem taxes as unconstitutional as a basis for the support of education and that unequal expenditure of funds between different districts for public education is also unlawful. While this ruling may have the greatest effect on education in the long run another in Pennsylvania will have untold implications for special education and has special implications for rural and sparcely settled areas. The case of the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children, Nancy Beth Bowman, et al vs Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, David H. Kurtzman, et al is a landmark case on the road to a bill of rights for the handicapped. This ruling among its many facets provides for:

(1) No postponement or in any way to deny to any mentally retarded child free access to a program of public education and training.

(2) Restrains school systems from "endying home instruction to any mentally retarded child merely because no physical disability accompanies the retardation or because retardation is not a short-term disability."

(3) Provides for immediate re-evaluation, for re-evaluation every year if requested by parent and re-evaluation of all children at least every two years.

(4) Access to a free public program of education and training appropriate to his learning capacities.

(5) No later than Spetember 1,1972, provision for education and training of children less than six years of age must be provided, etc.

(6) Where it is not possible to "form a special class in a district or to provide such education for any child in the public schools, the Board of Education of the district shall secure such proper education and training outside the public school of the district."

The implications of the above Act are:

(a) Testing or assessment services must be more extensive, more carefully administered and personnel whose secondary responsibility is testing must be discontinued. This will hit rural programs the hardest.

(b) Regular re-evaluation every two years must be instituted and more frequently if requested.

(c) Advisory committees must be employed to make placement and judgement based on data reviewed by professionals. Such actions will be acceptable to the courts.

(d) Parents must be involved in placement and should be kept informed on all actions.

(e) Failure to provide service for any handicapped child because of sparcely settled or low incidence figures is no longer an acceptable excuse.

(f) Claims of adequate services in the regular school programs are no longer

acceptable unless this meets the parent's expectations.

(g) Students on waiting lists to get into programs are not acceptable.

This ruling does imply the need to have appropriate education and training programs, such programs must also meet the approval of the court and whenever a program is not in existence, it must be provided or provision must be made to provide for education or training in non-public or other education. This case and subsequent state cases will function to kill all exclusion clauses or other attempts to keep even the trainable retarded from having a school program. Note should be taken that the ruling does not require the closing of special classes or that children must be in regular classes.

One of the first problems associated with special education in sparcely settled areas surrounds low incidence and lack of a population base. These problems while different are nevertheless interrelated and serve to impair special education in rural areas. The low incidence areas such as visual impairment are not a problem in a city like Atlanta for there are enough children within the area to justify a wise range of services. This is not true of rural areas. The second problem of sparcely settled areas and small school systems is now often solved or reduced by intermediate school districts, or shared service projects. In these cooperative ventures two to ten or more school systems go together in contractual or cooperative arrangements to render service across system lines. These are well represented by the CESA in Wisconsin, BOCES in New York, and shared services in Georgia. These cooperative or shared projects, are continuing to develop across the country and by all means have not solved all the problems. Availability of a full range of services from early childhood to vocational placement, transportation problems and lack of enough children to begin some programs are still unresolved problems. For these reasons I have given considerable consideration to supporting a voucher plan for Special Education. This is an idea I have opposed within regular

education since it seemed to be full of pitfalls in terms of propogating segregation, of producing an education elite, of wasting tremendous educational resources and could the potential downfall of public education. Both the NAACP and NEA oppose the voucher plan and suggested modifications of it. I, however, believe some of the dangers associated with voucher plans would not be a problem in Special Education. A voucher like plan has been practiced in Special Education in the past. Parents have beenpaid $4.00 an hour to secure tutors for homebound youngsters, states have made allotments for paying for the education of multi-handicapped children in other states. Some systems reimburse parents for transporting their own children. I see no reason where low incidence or sparcely settled areas are concerned why vouchers cannot be issued. It would be necessary that the voucher cover at least the minimum cost for educating the child in any special education program. It would not be sufficient for the parent to be granted $800 as the Washington D. C. schools did to parents of trainable retarded children when the actual cost of schooling was in excess of $1,600 per year. Such a voucher system would require the parent be accountable for the education of his child. Thus if four parents of the deaf went together to start a program for their children they would have to be as accountable as anyone else and such a program would be subject to the same evaluation schemes as any other. Such a program might also serve to facilitate the integration and assimilation of mildly handicapped children in regular schools. If a parent brought her child to a regular school with her voucher and asked if a program could be worked out to meet the child's needs, we might be surprised to see what teachers and principals would do with $1,600 above and beyond regular allotments. It might change some of the situations I am familiar with where the retarded students are not allowed on the playground, at lunch or in the gym at the same time as normal youngsters. The practice of the limited use of vouchers in special education might lead to the development of certification of children's

handicaps. Psychologists and educators could attend to the child's need for service based upon the parents' written request for determination of eligibility. Eligibility would not necessarily require a label but eligibility would legally earmark funds for program use development.

The next development will be one step beyond the parent where interested individuals, CEC chapters, agencies, or others will become the advocates for any handicapped child against parent or another agency to bring about adequate services.

Probably by this time everyone is familiar with the criticisms of the traditional special education model. Such criticisms have been directed towards the model as though an administrative arrangement were responsible for all the ills of special education. Most writers and many school officials see the resource program as being the solution to these problems. I hate to disillusion them but the problem is not that simple. Bruininks & Rynders (1971) indicate that "little improvement in services to children is likely to accrue from demands to replace one form of organizational inflexibility with another equally rigid pattern," p.2. They advocate a wide array of flexible service arrangements, intervention strategies and support systems designed to serve both the handicapped and their teachers. What is important to rural areas is the impact of the literature on the public and school administrators. While urban areas are now rejecting the special class model the rural areas which are just getting special education for the first time are celebrating the establishment of special classes. Thus, what is appropriate for one group does not necessarily apply to all. Rural schools serve a different population from urban schools and have different characteristics. Legislators, however, read the literature and talk to the other special educators who want to close up self-contained special classes. It is important to evaluate what model or models are most likely to match the rural situation and be prepared

In beginning any new program we must begin by determining what is best for the pupil population to be served. If the children in the target population are not too different from regular class children on those variables which are of most importance, then I see no reason why a resource room would not be a good approach. The resource program does provide for the flexibility of serving children with different types of learning problems, of serving children in several locations and of using various types of volunteers and/or tutors. If the discrepancy between the target population and the regular program is so great as to place the handicapped in an undesirable situation or such that they will not be tolerated in regular classes then some type of self-contained class or other arrangement needs to be considered. A resource program does offer the potential of serving children with different learning problems in the same program, wider age ranges and pupil population which are more scattered.

The solutions to delivering appropriate services to handicapped children in rural areas is not a simple one and certainly not as simple as special class vs regular class or resource vs special class. We can, though, begin to make some educational guesses and projections based upon the idea of accountability:

(1) Since Schwarz and Cook (1970) found little relationship between what a teacher said were her expectations for a pupil and what the child accomplished 8 months later, we need to closely examine the whol idea of expectancy. Expectancy and a good curriculum may be far more important than the lip service we have given both in the past.

(2) The provision of services in rural areas places a burden on traditional special education models. You just cannot find enough of certain types of handicaps in parts of

Georgia, Montana, South Dakota, Vermont, and many other states to have the urban three level sequential special class organization. Some of the magnitude of the problem can be seen in these comparisons. Montana encompasses more space than the entire New England states, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, and Delaware. One county in Montana is larger than the entire state of Connecticut. A survey showed eleven children with five different types of handicaps living in a county encompassing 3,300 square miles (Jordan, 1967). In Wyoming over 20% of the children still attend school in one room schools. Nineteen states still are characterized as over 50% rural with another sizable group approaching 50% of their area being rural.

One approach may be to raise the level of persons employed in rural areas to provide a person capable of reorganizing and working with volunteers and capable of using middle level manpower or developing differential staffing. Although the literature on the use of teacher aides is not as clear as it should be, some studies have shown up to 50% increase in achievement when aides were used (Reismann & Gartner, 1970). The use of aides, however, may not only increase the quality of instruction but could greatly increase the cost per student (Cook & Blessing, 1970). The use of several aides working under the direction of a master teacher serving a far larger group of children can be efficient and cost effective. In each such team someone should

be designated as accountable. When responsibility for accountability is assigned to one person, motivation and management techniques will be employed by that person to produce the desired results.

(3) The resource room concept may hold promise as outlined in the article by Glavin, et al (1971) under what is described as the Temple Resource Plan. The use of the term Temple Resource Room is desirable because there are many types of resource rooms as there are people and some standardization of terminology is to be desired. This resource room which is largely for children with behavior disorders emphasizes academic remediation with the use of responce - reinforcement contengencies in a structured classroom setting. While such resource programs were shown to increase the academic performance of children and reduce the amount of disruptive behavior the improvements to this time have not carried over into the regular classrooms. As they point out it may be possible to develop the ability to teach students to transfer the improved behavior they express in the resource room to the regular class.

We need to begin:

(A) Full assessment of children's strengths and weaknesses the first week of school. Unless a system provides assessment in terms of formal and informal tests, I would suggest teachers administer tests for each other or conduct educational evaluations and document proficiency levels for each other.

(B) When inappropriate materials appear to have been used, these errors should be documented and sent to the superintendent's office or coordinator's office (i.e. a linguistic approach having been used with children with auditory discrimination and blending deficiencies).

(C) Whenever a teacher is changing a program drastically, he should state in writing to the area supervisor why the program is being changed and make a report 6 months later on apparent inprovements, including available data.

(D) Each teacher should establish for each child levels of performance to be met by a certain time. These are well described in the literature under behavioral objectives.

(E) The teacher should request the consultative help, training experiences and materials she needs to do the job to superintendent or supervisor, in writing and retaining a copy.

(F) Parents should be kept informed of all activities. The teacher should specify for parent what child and parent must do to keep their part of the contract.

(G) Teachers should emphasize follow-up. Follow-up special class graduates or children served in special programs.

(H) Teachers should make sure they know what to do before starting a new program. One large system recently started resource programs only to learn they ended up with 49 different variations. Teachers must be constantly retrained and these activities must go far beyond what we know as in-service education.

(I) Teachers should seek to develop standard practices. Such practices would be well accepted procedures to try with specific educational problems. At this time there are no standard methods

which are taught. The nearest thing to such practice has been the Gillingham & Sullivan Manuals which have been through several editions.

(J) If special education is perverted we should make sure this is well documented. I visited a primary TMR class this fall and had identified by the teacher 4 of 12 children who were normal disturbed children but had been placed there by administrative pronouncement to remove a source of disruption in regular classes.

The responsibility goes far beyond the teacher.

I would remind you special education was started because of the mistreatment, lack of treatment, lack of concern, lack of programs in special education. Some people have forgotten this. It has been pointed out that special education may have been providing a respectable out for regular education for its failures.

Special education in your mind and in mine is as fine as hot apple pie but there are forces at work which will undo everything we have worked for. If we are to be accountable one place we must begin with is administrative action, policies, etc. Many of us believe special education has always been one of the most accountable of all programs. I have heard Dr. Lessinger say this on several occasions indicating we have specified for each child a set of expectations or an achievement goal. Even curriculum guides have been stated in terms of reachable goals. Curriculum and occupational expectations were at least theoretically relevant. We know, however, whatever we have done in the past is not good enough for the future. We must have an accountability for the administrator, for the teacher, and for the paren'. If a teacher is

to be held accountable it is likewise true that her administrator must provide the necessary tools and working situation to allow her to be productive. Special education programs without materials, without trained teachers, without educational assessment, with unworkable numbers have not done the profession any service. In the day of accountability, of the child advocate, of parent involvement, the above situations can and will be prevented.